

A study on unethical behavior in sport sport essay



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“ The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning but taking part; the essential thing in life is not conquering but fighting well.” This phrase was said by the founder of the Olympics, Baron Pierre de Coubertin. Where has this Olympic message gone to? Nowadays, it seems like everyone is only interested in the medals. Where is the motto of the Olympics; “ Citius, altius, fortius” - “ swifter, higher, stronger”, which can be interpreted as “ striving to beat one’s personal best” (Introduction: It’s not the, 2010). When I was younger, and still competing, I remember people telling me that it is not important to win, but to take part. Nowadays, sport is all about money. If you have money, you can be better, stronger and more successful. But what about the ethical issue?

Is today’s sport with all the money, commercialization, drug abuse and bribing still ethical? Can we be sure that the winner is really the best, not just the one who paid off the referees, or the one who has taken performance enhancing drugs? In my opinion, sport in general has become more about the money than the true competition within the fair-play and has gone far beyond what was sometimes called a celebration of the fittest, therefore unethical behavior in sport industry has increased rapidly. Competition by itself “ is not unethical”. It is normal that the success in the competition be rewarded. Competition is essential to sport as a good motivator; it pushes each individual to strive for his/her best. “ Celebrating achievement” is also not unethical” either, “ but it can drive some competitors to unethical behavior” (Introduction: It’s not the, 2010).

In current sport industry, there are many forms of unethical behavior starting from players and referees all the way to the media and fans. At first, we

need to clarify what the fair play means, as a synonym to ethics in sport. In sport fair play “ means using only tactics that are in accord with the spirit of the sport”. Unfortunately, many athletes do not follow this fair play rules to achieve the victory, but use other unfair methods, sometimes “ dubious but legal, sometimes illegal.

Players

These days, professional players, athletes or sportsmen earn gigantic amounts of money. They do not only represent themselves as individual, but many times, they are the icons of certain brands. These brands create multi-million contracts with athletes in order to connect their brand with excellent performance of the athletes. Therefore, these athletes are put under enormous pressure, not only from their teams, but also from their sponsors. Besides this fact, many of the professional athletes represent the icons, or are role models to many young people all over the world, so the pressure is even bigger. This creates fertile conditions for unethical behavior, sometimes unintentionally, sometimes on purpose.

Being unfair, does not have to necessarily mean illegal, but it can still be referred to as cheating. Such forms of cheating may be distracting your opponents during the game or the race by saying different rude things to your opponents, also “ misrepresenting one’s skills is another technique, where you make your opponent over or underestimate you, which may benefit the athlete. These examples are not against the rules, but certainly could be referred to as unethical behavior. Another example of unethical behavior especially favorite among football players is called faking or

simulation of the foul. This has been incorporated in to the rules of football because of the frequent misuse by players (Rules and Regulations, 2010).

The most concerned unethical behavior among players is using performance enhancing drugs. This form of cheating is illegal, and doping controls cost international federations lots of money. Performance enhancing drugs “ are any substance taken to perform better athletically”, or are also called anabolic steroids (Performance-Enhancing Drug, n. d.). The taking of such drugs not only enhances your performance, but it causes serious health problems. This issue is not only a problem of health of the abusers, but these athletes are role models for many young people, so if the case reveals, young people can copy their models in order to win. We are living in a very competitive world with everyone trying to push the borders. That is why many people start using drugs; they are unable to keep up with the others, who might also use doping. There is a long list of forbidden substances created by anti-doping agencies, but there is still a big controversy. Some of the medically prescribed drugs contain forbidden substances and even this is being misused (Guler, 2003). Taking drugs is unethical, but also very questionable, because the use of “ enhancement substances... dates back to Ancient Greek”, where athletes were taking some natural products to enhance their performance (Performance-Enhancing Drug, n. d.). There are debates, to create two categories of sport, one “ clean” and another one where steroids will be allowed.

Cycling is one of the sports where doping is used. Lance Armstrong has been accused several times for using such drugs, but it has never been confirmed.

Many people think he must have taken something, because of his extraordinary performance at The Tour de France.

Another case with the use of doping was revealed in 2003, it was “ the biggest doping cover up”. In the 1988 Seoul Olympics, Ben Johnson, a Canadian sprinter, won a gold medal in a World record. But later, he was positively tested on a forbidden substance, so the medal was taken from him and given to Carl Lewis, the American athlete. But 15 years later, it was revealed that 19 American athletes who had not passed the drug tests “ were allowed to compete at Olympic Games” from 1988 to 2000. Among them was Carl Lewis, who was given the gold medal, after Ben Johnson was disqualified (10 Drug scandals, 2003).

As we can see in the table below, the number of athletes that failed the drug tests has an increasing potential. This is not a good sign for the sport, it gives bad impression. Many athletes that failed the tests publicly claim that the others are using it as well; they just have not got caught yet.

I have had a personal experience with unethical behavior of players. When I was a cross country skier, I heard about some of my colleagues taking some kind of performance enhancing substances. I refused to be like them, because I believe in clean sport, and it was against my values and principles, but on the other hand, I was never the best. I think this is the issue of taking such drugs, which some people, even if they prepare, and train their hardest, never win, so they are frustrated and agree to take these drugs to equal to their competitors.

Referees

In this group, bribery is very common and unethical practice. Referees are also exposed to enormous pressure since there is a lot of money involved in the sport, therefore winning can sometimes be achieved by other way than just a matter of chance. If the team is about to fall out of the first league, or it is a very important match, referees might be bribed to make decisions in favor of only one party. Mostly this is the case in countries where referees have low salaries, therefore they are very vulnerable to accept a bribe. Referees should be honest, and their top value should not be money, otherwise they are very likely to be bribed (Guler, 2003).

Referee can also influence the game unintentionally, without being bribed. It is because referees are also only humans, and humans make mistakes. In some sports, referees have to make decisions in milliseconds, where technology is being used to help the referees out if they are not sure about the call. In hockey for example, there is also a video referee, in cases the main referees on the ice do not see what happened. Also in tennis, a new technological feature was introduced, a " Hawk-eye", which is an " electronic line-calling system". This feature is used when a tennis player challenges the line call. The questioned call is replayed on the screen, and the new call is then made (TENNIS: Hawk-Eye, 2007). Many people would like to see such feature in football, where a video- referee would be included, and there would also be cameras inside the net to show whether the ball passes the line or not in disputable cases.

Betting is another situation, when referees are being paid off. There was one case in the NBA, where a referee was pleaded guilty in 2007 for receiving \$ 5000 bribe in a betting case (NBA Referee Tim Donaghy, 2007).

Media

Television and the radio are also to be blamed for unethical behavior in sport. These two are the main form of commercializing the entire sport industry. The entire pressure we talked about before is derived from the media advertising and commercializing. It is questionable to what extent does the media tell the truth about the player or the team. The evaluations from the media can be biased as well. A private television can be a partner of a sport team, and they can intentionally create a better picture for their viewers about that concrete team. This is also very unethical. Sport journalist or commentators can favor one team or the other, and his evaluation of this team can be biased compared to the reality, and so the public may perceive it this way too. Media can very easily destroy the whole reputation of certain player or entire team (Guler, 2003).

On one side, it is good to have media, because we can watch many different matches all over the world, but on the other side, the pressure of the media on the industry is enormous.

While I was in the United States, I went to an American football match. I remember Notre Dame was playing against the Navy. It was a great experience for me, but what surprised me, that the game was interrupted by the referee, for the advertisement in the media. I thought it was kind of

annoying, and also unfair for both teams of the game, because they were interrupted in the middle of the action.

Fans

This group is also connected to sport ethics, even though fans do not get any money from the actual sport, instead they have to pay to watch it. Some groups think that if they pay for the match, they have the “right to act against the rules”. For some fans it is hard to understand that not only their team must win, but also the opponent has the same chance to win. There are fans that “[believe] everything is fair for [their] team to win”, which is different from supporting the team. Such fans are called “hooligans” or “ultras” in Slovakia, and their actions are sometimes very unethical. Such fans are many times very aggressive either towards referees, players, innocent fans, or also to the property around (Guler, 2003).

In Slovakia, it was this year’s ice-hockey play-offs between Slovan Bratislava and HC Kosice, where the Slovan fans pulled out a transparent with this heading: “Julo, is it true your girlfriend has cheated on you?” Julo is a Kosice’s goalkeeper, and I know personally his girlfriend. I think this was very unethical, very offending. Such a behavior should not be present at sporting events, because it is against fair play.

This might be a failure of the organizers, and also of the law, because it is sometimes ridiculous, what the hooligans are capable of.

As mentioned above, the sport environment is becoming more and more connected with unethical behavior. Sport as such, should be “creating unity, promoting values and community pride”. It can affect peoples’ lives and

therefore, everyone involved in sport from coaches, parents, athletes, fans to referees should try to make it as fair and enjoyable as possible.

Not only rules are important in sport, but also values and morals. It is essential for the coaches to teach their athletes what behavior is good and fair, because people have different values, and some of them cannot even distinguish between what is good and what is bad. According to Ms. Sandler, these four values are “ the most important...in sport ethics”: fairness, integrity, respect and equity (Sandler, 2009). Integrity, according to Cambridge dictionary, means “ having strong moral principles that you refuse to change”. Fairness means to treat people fairly and equally. Equity in a meaning that everyone should be treated equally, and finally respect; athletes should treat others with honor.

In order to be ethical while enrolling in sport activity, these steps should be remembered:

1. “ Glory cannot be owned”. Everyone can get a hold of it, but not for ever.
2. “ Don’t give up after the bad game”. Bad games should only make us more prepared.
3. Success does not have to mean happiness in sport. If you do not find self- respect, you will not be happy.
4. “ Successful athletes do not have enemies”. We should respect our competitors, rather than looking for ways how to attack them (Sandler, 2009).

As I suggested in the introduction, I think sport has become unethical. While in the past, in the ancient Greece, when there were Olympics, no wars were allowed, everyone was celebrating the beauty and the art of sport. People were cheering all together, and when the winner came up, they treated him with respect. Unlike today, when we have Olympic Games, we are worried about the terrorist attacks and anti-doping controls have to be run to ensure the fair-play. I am against the doping or any other steroid use, therefore I support the clean sport without any performance enhancing drugs. I think there should be more serious penalties for abusing drugs. It should be part of our educational system to educate young children about the cons of using such substances. Also the morality in sport and ethics in general needs to be improved. Nowadays people, young kids especially are being very aggressive towards each other, which leads to similar consequences as mentioned. Fans fight against the fans of other clubs, people are afraid to go to a football match with their kids. I also think sport should not be sponsored so much by corporate businesses, and the salaries and transfer fees should be much lower. I think it is unbelievable, how much money some of the best players or athletes earn. If we imagine there are people on this planet that do not have their basic needs satisfied, it is against the logic.

On the other hand, there are people supporting doping and the use of steroids in sport, claiming that they want to see the borders of human ability to be pushed, and so are supportive. There are even people who would choose to die earlier, from the side effects of the steroids, just to be the best, to feel the glory.

Ethics in sport is very important. Our culture has created this competitive hatred against each other along with all the money involved in the present form of sport. Sport can have a huge influence on people therefore we should try to stop the unethical issues around it. We have to understand that it is not possible to win every time. What is important to learn is how to handle losing in a way it can help us in the future. Even if we lose, it is important to show respect to our competitors.

We, the people on Earth have caused this turn-over of what was sometimes a celebration, to so called " sport" full of hatred, jealousy and shortcuts, therefore it is up to the mankind to decide which way are we going to follow.

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